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OLD HORSE GRAY.

AND

THE PARISH OF GRUMBLETON.

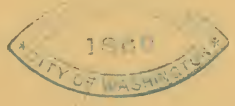
BY

EDWARD HOPPER.

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO THE MERCIFUL PHILOZOIST, HENRY BERGH.

"A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast."

SOLOMON.



NEW YORK:
PUBLISHED BY HURD AND HOUGHTON.
Cambridge: Riverside Press.
1869.

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RIVERSIDE, CAMBRIDGE:
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY
H. O. HOUGHTON AND COMPANY.

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OLD HORSE GRAY.

GRUMBLETON.

FAR and away, among the hills,
Remote from city goods and ills,
An ever-flowing stream upon,
In days a-gone, sate Grumbleton.
The woodman's axe first found the place,
And thrift soon followed on apace,
To see, with joy, the virgin plain
Quickened with living fields of grain, —
The little hills alive with flocks,
The farmyards vocal with their cocks,
And rows of hives, of honey bees,
Foretelling future industries.
The fishes, swarming in the streams,
Were sporting with the sun's bright beams;
And birds of song and plumage rare
With joy and beauty filled the air.

Upspringing here sweet Sharon's rose

Breathed heavenly balm, for human woes,
And pointed to the higher bliss,
Lest men should set their hearts on this.
Then did the wilderness rejoice,
With anthems of a purer voice
Than nature tuned for man's dull ears,
To lift his heart, and dry his tears:
And the sweet vale, to simple eyes,
Became a gateway to the skies.

The gentle shepherd led his flock
To water gushing from the rock,
And pastures fresh with morning dews.
He guarded them from fall, and bruise,
And prowling wolves, by night and day:
And if one ever went astray
He searched it out through sun and rain,
And brought it to the fold again,
To heal its torn and bleeding wound;
Rejoicing that the lost was found.
O, happy shepherd! peaceful fold!
With gate so near the heavenly wold!

Times change, and men change with the times,
In Christian as in heathen climes.
Art, passing, saw this goodly land,
And touched it with her magic wand,
When lo! the space was gone between

The distant mart and this fair scene;
And monsters of the iron path
Came thundering like the day of wrath;
And restless demons from below,
With fiery eyes, glared to and fro,
Scattering wealth, and death, and woe;
And city breath, that taints the air,
Rushed, with the snorting monsters, there.

The changeful men change with the times,
In Christian as in heathen climes;
So when the golden tide flowed on
The humble plains of Grumbleton,
And lusty Greed, and flaunting Pride,
Came, sailing on the swelling tide,
To raise the standard of revolt,
An itching palm drew back the bolt
That guarded the fair citadel;
While, from the walls, the sentinel
Cried out the treacherous, "All is well!"

Then sprang to arms, good father Prynn,
The Parson, who had fought 'gainst sin
Until his locks were white and thin.
He, now, when he was weak and old,
Must meet these foemen stout and bold;
And fight, to save his simple fold
From Fashion, Pride, and lusty Gold.

And Prynn, to make the story brief,
Did in the battle come to grief.
For Gold, full-armed, with wings and stings,
Has power beyond all earthly things.
And Pride, behind her brazen front,
Flaunts boldly, in the battle's brunt;
And if o'erwhelmed, in her distress,
Retreats behind thick fastnesses,
Where, though besieged, disdains to yield,
But hopes, once more, to take the field;
And e'en half starved, in rags, will strive,
And struggle on, till skinned alive.
And Fashion hath a thousand heads,
With which her champions she weds;
So when one falls, with fresher face
Another springs into its place!
And hence the parson who would fight 'em,
Must battle on ad infinitum.

The sheep are scattered in the fight,—
Some fall, the prey of wolves, by night;
And some are lured, the silly pates,
Within the foemen's tempting gates,
Nor know, amid the pleasant rambles,
That they are fattening for the shambles;
Some, straying far, grow wild in breed,
And will not follow more, nor heed
The shepherd's crook and piping reed;

But, nature changed, the sheep now lead,
And shepherds follow, in their need,
Through stress of hunger, or for greed.
But few remain within the fold,
To shepherd faithful, as of old
The sylvan prophets had foretold.

Good father Prynn, thus sorely tried,
Thanked Heaven that his sweet May had died,
Ere such a blight had fallen upon
Their long-nursed flower of Grumbleton.
Though, surely, were she living now,
To drive away the cares that plow
Such cruel furrows in his brow,
His heart were stronger for the strife;
And sweeter were his cup of life, —
Such sweetness was in May, his wife.
But to her gentle soul was given
To leave their sacred flower unriven,
And on its fragrance rise to heaven.

THE PARISH HORSE MARKET.

In halcyon days when men were few,
With just enough to eat, and do,
And did their travelling by stage,
Their progress they could always gauge

By change of horses on the route.
And so could Grumbleton, no doubt,
In those good days we write about.
By changing off their parish jade
They showed the *progress* they had made:
But whether it was up or down,
We'll see, perchance, as we pass on.
A *trifle!* some Mosheim may say, —
But trifles empires, sometimes, sway!
A feather shows what wind is blowing;
A straw which way the tide is flowing;
A little rudder steers the steamer;
The tongue is small, but what a screamer!
E'en gold but specks of shining dust is,
And yet it turns the scales of justice,
And even modifies men's notions
Of holy doctrines and devotions;
It rears tall spires to raise men's eyes
To endless beauty, in the skies;
And paves the way to heaven with "tin,"
So that the rich may enter in;
Who thus allured, so crowd the door,
There's scarcely room left for the poor;
For nearer to heaven you build the steeple
The nearer to heaven you'll get the people.
A great advance on times, whilom,
When rich men scarce to heaven would come,
But generally left the welcome door

To be monopolized by "the poor,
And needy, wounded, sick, and sore."
Thus little things are cause of great ones,
As early saints were unlike late ones,
And little Muse, like mine, of all things,
Must not despise the day of small things.
But more anon, the bell has rung,
And shows the power of one sharp tongue
To drive from house into the street
The people who of needs must meet
In sacred church, to meditate,
And criticize, and contemplate,
And vote, and choose, or else refuse
To buy the coming candidate.
An honest horse-market, of course,
And not like jockeying for a horse.
For, now assembled, Grumbleton
Must choose a horse, in place of one
Worn out in parish work, they said,
And living when he should be dead.

Horse-owners came from far and near,
With nags of all sorts, cheap and dear;
How many truth wont please to tell,
Nor *why* each had a *horse to sell.*
The parish heads were getting sore;
They'd met some twenty times, or more,
And still were *vacant*, as before.

So hard a thing is parish choice,
Which needs majority of voice.

Titus, the deacon, number one,
And richest man of Grumbleton,
Esquire and owner of much land,
Was chairman of the judge's stand,
And called the order of the day.
"Trot out the Sorrel! next the Bay!
And next the Brown! But take away
The piebald nag, and that young Gray!
What were such horses made for? drot 'em,
They've neither wind, nor speed, nor bottom!
Now trot 'em out, the harness in,
To see which horse the race shall win!
Trot 'em out fairly!
Show 'em off squarely!
Then let us know their pedigree;
For parish horse must perfect be;
A gentle horse, though horse alive,
And one that women folk can drive,
And one that has some decent speed,
And one that's easy on his feed;
In fact we want an easy keeper,
In the long run it makes him cheaper,
Beside, we want no horse that shies
At everything that meets his eyes;
A horse trained as he ought to be,

Knows what, and knows what not, to see.
But *most*, we want a horse to *draw:*
The finest horse eye ever saw
To parish is not worth a straw,
Though from all faults and failings free,
Perfect in form and symmetry,
Age, sire, and dam, and pedigree,
Limb, wind, and bottom, color, and speed
To distance every other steed,
If he can't *draw*, in chaise or dray,
All sorts of loads by night and day —
My word you may rely upon,
He's not the horse for Grumbleton.
So trot 'em out, and let us try,
And see, what horse is best to buy,
And let the nags know that all eyes
Are looking on to criticize.
And let us have no jockey-ruse,
That all may fairly judge and choose,
And no one say that I've been rash
In laying out the parish cash,
Now trot 'em out fairly!
Show 'em off squarely!
Wind, limb, bottom, and dash!"

Thus Titus spake. The reason why
Good Grumbleton a horse would buy
Was on the housetops, far and nigh;

(And crows discussed it, on the sly, —
Brother to sable-coated brother, —
With heart to prey, and longing eye ;)
They'd turned their old horse out to die,
And so of course must have another ;
And as for that, — a *parson* too ;
For change of horse had much to do
With change of parsons, in the place :
These two had aye kept equal pace ; —
A parson new came with new horse
In Grumbleton, as thing of course,
And what made deacon Titus say,
The parish would not try a gray,
And piebald horse refuse to buy,
Was that this color palled his eye.
Beside, the horse turned off to die,
Was *gray* ; and oft, the deacon said,
Had haunted him, upon his bed,
With nightmare's hideous shapes and screams,
Half horse, half human, in his dreams :
And oft-times crossed his path by day ;
And *Titus did not like the gray.*
More pity that so good a man,
The chief and leader of the clan,
And richest, did not like the jade.
Much difference it might have made
In old horse Gray's declining years ;
For good men's love dries many tears ;

And e'en a horse, worn out and old,
Is better for a rich man's gold.
And gold when given to help the poor
Brings angels to the giver's door,
With benedictions from their Lord;
And groweth more than miser's hoard;
And like the farmer's scattered grain
Comes back in golden sheaves again.
True, the old Gray was lame and slow,
And couldn't go as he used to go,
And couldn't draw as he used to draw;
Yet all confessed they never saw
A horse do more than what he could,
And live upon so little food;
Nor one more willing, kind, and true,
To do what e'er he had to do;
Nor one more faithful to his trust;
Nor less deserving to be thrust
Upon the parish-road, to die.
Old men remembered, with a sigh,
How he had toiled long years gone by;
And children, with a moistened eye,
Brought tufts of grass, and clover sweet,
And, prattling, stood to see him eat.
Poor horse! poor jade! worn out and old!
The coming winter, with its cold,
And pelting storms, and grassless soil,
Will end his life of want and toil:

Such is the history of the Gray,
Who now gives place to Brown or Bay.

The custom was, in Grumbleton,
To have a horse which every one
Could ride and drive; and all should own.
And by Church Records it was shown
A parson new must come, of course,
Whene'er the parish bought new horse;
The old horse out, the new horse in,
Was now as it had ever been,
To bring a young and fresher face
Into the wrinkled parson's place.
These changes always went together;
Nor was it long debated whether
They should depart from their old course,
That linked the parson with the horse.

'Tis true that deacon Goodale dared
Defend the Gray; but, then, he fared
Like one who sweeps, with broom, the tide;
For he was poor, and old beside,
And shaky in his voice and word,
And not like deacon Titus heard.

Good deacon Titus, answering, spake,
With voice that did not quail nor quake,
"Parson and horse have had their day;

And both are old, worn out, and gray;
And should be left to go their way!
True 'they have heat and burden borne
For Grumbleton,' ere they were shorn
Of strength to bear them, but their strength
And youth have passed away, at length;
And neither has the power to *draw*,
And hence should yield to parish law.
Beside 'twould cost as much to feed
The two old jades, and more, indeed,
Than younger ones, with better teeth
And smaller stomachs underneath;
And all the parish, by the bye,
Knows corn and hay are very high."

Then deacon Goodale rose, and spake,
With words which, once, forgot to quake:
"In with the young nag! let him fill
One half as well the parish thill
As the old Gray, — as patiently,
When weak, through lack of food, as he;
Nor balk beneath the heaviest load;
And stand the kicks, and cuffs, and goad
Of parish tongues as he has stood;
With work twice measured for his food;
And he will earn a better fate
Than the old Gray has had of late; —
At least he'll earn the right to live,

Which Grumbleton will grudge to give."
He ended: and a murmuring breeze
Began to sway the sighing trees
And chafe the sullen waters gray;
When, suddenly, the trolling Bay
Came thundering by to win the day.
The rising winds, at once, subside;
And, changing, turns the changeful tide,
And wrangling waves hushed, soft, and sweet,
Submissive kiss the conqueror's feet.
Young, sprightly, graceful, full of mettle,
He's just the candidate to settle!
The ladies praise his shiny coat,
And legs,—on which the angels dote:
And "O!" they say, "such lovely eyes!
They must have dropped down from the skies.
Indeed the Bay will be a prize!
We ought to buy him just to show
The neighbors what they ought to know,
That Grumbleton 's as good as they,
By odds, and better, any day!"

At length good Titus reappears,
And ladies' tongues are turned to ears:
When Titus speaks the audience hears!
The richest man of Grumbleton,
And parish deacon number one
(With mute assent of old and young),

Was, by this right, the parish tongue.
Ascending, now, the pulpit stairs,
For logic grave, and rhetoric airs,
He cleared the way with sounding sneeze,
And handkerchief, the more to please,
Then, hand stretched forth, spake words like these:
"My friends! We, now, have come inside,
To vote upon the horses tried.
I hope this time for unity:
That is, I hope we'll all agree;—
In short, that you will think with me.
A Church divided, you all know,
Is like a clock that cannot go.
Freedom of speech and use of tongue,
Is parish right to old and young,
And always rather overdone,
In this good town of Grumbleton.
Wielding more power than a king,—
This voting upsets everything!
When I say *yea* and you say nay,
The thing brings discord and delay.
Therefore let all do as I say,
And follow where I lead the way.
In fine, I think the three-year Bay
Is the best horse we've tried to-day,
And just the nag we ought to buy—
(Unless *his price* shall *prove too high*)."

He paused, with oratoric pause,
To wait for breath and the applause,
And time to think what next to say;
When, forthwith, shoutings for the Bay
Rose, clamorous, from every pew,
With clappings neither faint nor few,
While waving handkerchiefs declare
(Embroidered, scenting all the air,)
The sweet approval of the fair;
And smiles and noddings feminine
Arouse the gender masculine
To cheers for Bay, and such love-proofs,
Till all the shingles on the roofs
Seem cracking with that horse's hoofs,
Applauding thus the speaker's choice.
Then silence. Then a questioning voice,
That trembled with its venturous task,
Arose, and meekly begged to ask
The horse's price, as if in fear
His figure might be found too dear.

Good Titus answered, in reply,
"The price must suit, or we wont buy!
His owner must be brought to terms,
To suit the purse of feeble worms.
The horse has passed examination,
And meets my perfect approbation —
That is, he meets the parish views, —

Is just the horse we ought to choose,
Sound every way, as all can see,
In limb, wind, bottom, pedigree,
Age, color, — all except his price;
This, owing to his owner's vice
Of greed, is much above our purse.
But, still, I know we might do worse,
I told him, 'we're a chosen few,
With little means and much to do,'
Which brought him down a peg or two —
Say ten per cent., — but still his view
Of self-denial, for the cause,
Is measured by mere worldly laws;
In fact, he dared to say, 'we ought
To buy a horse as others bought;'
His words were, '*If your purse is small*
Then buy a cheaper animal!'
Such insult thrown into my face,
Showing a heart devoid of grace,
We must forgive, in such a place,
Because the horse is worth far more,
I know, than we can buy him for;
Besides, example has its force,
E'en when a parish buys a horse!"

The people, pleased and profited,
Applauded all the speaker said;
But learning what they had to pay,

Their love grew lukewarm toward the Bay,
And during recess, for the higgling,
Browbeating, chaffering, and wriggling,
About the horse's parts and price,
And duty of self-sacrifice,
For sake of comfort in the sky,
Showing that hay and oats were high,
Which made it difficult to buy,
Proving the Church's lack of means,
Through failure of last crop of beans;
Proving the owner's duty plain,
To suffer loss for parish gain,
And to the excellent of earth
To sell the horse for half his worth;
Their murmurings began to rise
Above the pews, like buzzing flies,
Or bees that swarm on blossom trees;
Except that stings pertain to bees,
And parish-tongues have none of these.
Some, silent, brooded serious thought,
Which peeped much sooner than it ought;
For peeping thought, when hatched, with words,
Soon flies about, like fledgeling birds.
"That bay horse feels his oats too much!
Too good for common folks to touch!
The nag's too proud to know his station!
There's more than one horse in creation!
The parish can afford to wait!

The sorrel has a better gait!
The switch-tail, if his wind was good,
Or Bob — (but he takes too much food),
Or Brown himself, if only he
Could show a proper pedigree;
Or almost any horse would do;
But hang the Bay! and let him go!"

As when a tribe of swarming bees,
Excited, fly from trees to trees,
Filling with busy noise the air,
Will light, at last, no one knows where;
And show, beside their buzzing wings,
And honey art, and such sweet things,
They also have the gift of stings,
Unless some timely drum or kettle
Shall sound the place for them to settle,
So now the buzzing Parish hive
With dire confusion was alive.

Just then old Gray, who chanced to pass
Through grave-yard gate, to crop the grass,
Was seen, by tombstones hid, almost;
And seemed that horse's walking ghost,
So lean, so pale, so woebegone,
So friendless, in the world alone!
Yet faithful nags as Gray had been,
Have power to move the hearts of men;

And weaker things, whilom, were known
To shake a Diotrephes' throne.

A wag cried, "*Gray, who nears his doom,*
Is choosing for himself a tomb!"
Hearing his name, the honest Gray
Pricked up, and whinnied forth a neigh;
His neigh inflamed the kindling fire;
And cheers for Gray rose high and higher;
And tongues of flame flashed old Gray's name,
As fitful as the tongues of Fame;
And pæans rose, from good and bad,
For qualities he never had;
While he, unconscious of their praises,
Silent, among the grave-stones, grazes.
But mid the graves his virtues bloom,
Like beauty rising from the tomb.
At length one, springing on his seat,
Harangues, with voice more loud than sweet,
"There's more good substance in the Gray,
Twice told, than in that dandy Bay!
And far less shadow any day!
He's good for ten years, yet, of life!
Let's call him back and end the strife!"

Thus did the parish bees divide,
With ebb and flood of changing tide;
Nor Titus could, by drum of kettle,

Induce the buzzing swarms to settle;
And war was imminent to all;
When, timely, in came Deacon Small,
Who drew, from each contending clan,
All eyes to see the little man.
This Deacon Small his life began
And ended on the smallest plan:
In name, and size, and nature, small;
A little chap, at first, like all,
He aye remained a little chap;
And aye unweened from love of pap;
Nor larger man could clutch so soon,
The handle of a public spoon,
Nor hold it for a longer spell,
Than Deacon Small, when Small was well.
His mouth was made of cream and cakes,
His eyes, though small, were bright as snakes;
His cheeks were maiden cheeks, unfringed;
His lips white lilies, slightly tinged;
Absent of mind, the little elf
Seemed always looking for himself;
Not so, in sooth, for even now
His eyes were fixed on Titus' brow,
To save that ruling man, his master,
From loss of head and such disaster;
For Deacon Small had always said,
That Titus was the Parish head,
Ere since, behind the grass he heard

That godly deacon's solemn word,
As if inspired of the Lord,
"Upon the Church walls write *Upharsin*,
Unless we get another parson."
And as a faithful pup his master
Follows, to warn off all disaster,—
Though barking dogs do seldom bite us,
The little deacon followed Titus.
To topmost pulpit's sacred height
He clomb, to bring himself in sight;
As little men had climbed before,
And will till pulpits are no more.
For little cocks, not always shiest,
Do strut the most and perch the highest.
Ambitious, and to lift himself
To favor with the man of pelf,
With hair well oiled, and oily tongue,
He spake in favor of the young.
His voice, though like the voice of child,
And feeble, was not always mild,
But harsh whene'er it took the whim,
And lisped, at times, in spite of him;
And from his little throat ejected
Words lofty, and high up inflected,
Like popguns blurting on the ear,
That, nolens volens, each should hear,
With gestures meant to match, intense,
The little man's grandiloquence.

"I ri-th," he said, "in the name of Pea-th!
To bid the raging billowth cea-th!
I wish to be, as 'twere, the grease
On creaking parish wheels; to be
The oil upon the troubled sea
Of Grumbleton, this stormy day!
The wind that sweeps the chaff away!
And so forth! Friends, I've nought to say,
And no one has, against old Gray.
He hath been faithful, and his name
Is writ upon the scroll of fame,
There to remain, beyond the tomb,
Until the awful crash of doom!
But, friends, a worn-out horse, or man,
Hath never drawn, and never can!
A horse that's kept till he is old
Cannot be traded off nor sold.
Then what on earth are we to do,
Who need a horse and can't keep two,
But just to let the old one go,
And buy a young one? that is so!
I'm for a young horse, when we get
A nag to suit us, but not yet:
There's money saved if we delay!
At least, the cost of oats and hay.
Meanwhile, by trying, as we ought,
In faith, a good horse can be bought
For half his worth; for so they say

Our fathers bought, when young, the Gray,
And better horse could not be found,
If they had searched the country round!
His owner, given to pious ways,
Sold him for half his cost to raise.
Now, when the Parish wants are known,
We'll get a horse, as I have shown,
For half, or say, two thirds, his worth,
If piety still lives on earth.
And if it don't, why then, I say,
We'll save enough by the delay,
To keep one full a year in hay!
Moreover, there's a score of steeds
For every one a parish needs:
Some the best nags that walk the earth,
And some, as Titus saith, not worth
A hooter! Which, with jockey-ruse,
Who rush so when they hear the news,
It seems impossible to choose!"

Thus bravely spake the little man
For Titus, leader of the clan,
With tricky aim, to help his plan;
Nor ended ere a darkling sky,
And wind-gust told a storm was nigh,
Which caused the parish to disperse,
Ere matters bad had come to worse.

THE DEACONS' DUEL.

That evening Goodale made his way
To Deacon Titus, to allay
The wrath he saw instead of grace,
In that good Christian brother's face.
The wrathful Titus saw his motion,
And knowing Goodale's secret notion,
He thus forestalled his friendly greeting, —
"You spoke quite fierce, to-day, in meeting!
Quite fierce, sir! And, sir! I am free
To say you lack in charity!
You don't possess a Christian spirit,
And never did; nor nothing near it;
You mean to split the church in two;
A thing, sir, you shall always rue!
Don't say '*you don't!*' you mean to do it!
You *spoke*, sir! and you know and knew it;
And he that splits a church shall rue it!
Tell me I'm *talking in a fog!*
What! drive a wedge into a log,
Then say you didn't mean to split it?
If you don't like the church then quit it!
What will the world say of your course,
To split the church on an old horse?
You'd better leave than stay to fight us!"
Said the indignant, irate Titus.

Goodale, uncowed and with a smile,
Replied with neither gall nor guile, —
"What will the world say of our course,
If we shall starve our faithful horse?
All I have asked for,' is some way
Provided for our poor, old Gray,
Now turned out on the road to die,
Before another horse we buy.
The world don't treat its servants so,
Though churches sometimes do, I know;
I have no fields, but I will give
My mite to help the poor jade live;
And if we all should do the same
We'd save his life and our good name."

By this soft answer mollified,
Good Titus, *reasoning*, now replied, —
"You know, good brother (with a sigh),
I do not wish the Gray to die!
No man 's a softer heart than I;
I couldn't deprive a thing of breath;
I dread the very name of death;
Nothing should die, had I my way,
In all this world, much less old Gray!
How then can you suppose that I
Could wish the poor old jade to die?
To starve and freeze to death with cold!
But, then, you *must* know he is *old;*

He's lost what jockeys call '*the go*;'
The amount of '*go*' that's in a horse
Is what we buy him for, of course.
When that is gone, you know, my friend,
His usefulness is at an end.
Then what are we to do, I ask,
But let the poor jade quit his task;
And set him free, to go his ways
In peace, the remnant of his days?
We could not sell him, I engage,
For all the country knows his age;
Nor swap him, without more to boot
Than our poor parish-purse would suit.
Then what, as honest, pious men,
Are we to do, I ask again,
But open wide the stable-door
To show him he's not wanted more?
There isn't room enough for two,
Nor work for more than one to do.
It seems to me that such release
Must give the jade a sense of peace;
As when from life a man is driven
His soul is glad to go to heaven.
Besides, the pasture on the road
For miles and miles is very good;
Nor is there any other horse
Turned out in all that distant course.
And sure in wandering through the town,

He'll often find some *bars left down;*
And if, perchance, he should go in,
When hungry, it would be no sin!
'Twould be a cruel thing, indeed,
And one to make my spirits bleed,
If Gray should ever come to need.
But we can trust kind Providence
(Who walk by faith and not by sense),
That He who doth the ravens feed,
And crows, and such, will give good heed
To our good Gray, somehow or other:
'Twere sin to doubt it, my good brother!"

This reasoning, clear and eloquent,
With pious breath, was vainly spent.
Old Goodale still was unconvinced,
Though in the Titus-grasp he winced,
For Titus had a steel-trap way
Of clinching what he had to say,
By clutching tight, on victory bent,
His foeman's arm in argument;
And from his eyes shot arrows fierce,
His foeman's panoply to pierce.
But trembling Goodale stood his ground,
And by the effort courage found;
And braver grew the more he fought,
As he who fights for justice ought.

"The man who trusts in Providence
Does well, if he use common sense,"
Said Goodale, with a gentle frown,
To brace himself from backing down
On old horse Gray; while Titus stared,
Amazed at what his foeman dared,
Silent as when a thunder-cloud
Is loading for a crash most loud.
"For Providence will never fill
A horse's mouth by miracle.
And He who teaches us to pray,
Give us our bread, day after day,
Has also, by the apostle, said,
A man must work to earn his bread.
Suppose, to prove, now, what you say,
You keep your horses' feed away;
Would angels bring them oats and hay,
In pity, lest the poor beasts die?
Or to yourself your rule apply!
It might be well if angels should
Bring down from heaven our daily food,
And carry it from door to door;
'Twould be a great help to the poor,
And parsons, and that sort of men,
Who eat no one knows what, or when;
And would, beside, the parish free
From poor-fund tax and salary,—
Two things that press upon the people

More than the weight of tallest steeple.
But this is not the angels' way
Toward parsons poor or horses gray;
We've got to feed them, or they'll die;
'Tis plain as daylight in the sky;
'Tis no use trusting Providence
Without the use of common sense!"

Good Deacon Titus, thus addressed,
With pent-up thunder was oppressed,
Like one with food he can't digest;
And, holding in too long, at last
On Goodale burst a fearful blast!
"How dare you talk this way to *me*,
You splitter of society!
What! don't believe in miracles?
Then why not join the infidels?
A pretty Churchman, I declare!
Enough to make an angel swear!
Deny the faith before *my face!*
I swan to man! if 'twan't for grace,
You heretic! I'd throttle you!
Don't say, '*Be careful what I do!*'
I know what I'm about, you scamp!
You Achan in our troubled camp!
I know, now, who has cursed the place,
And kept away the showers of grace,
While rain has fallen everywhere,

And left our vineyard parched and bare,
So that we owe to Prynn and Gray
Two years back salary to-day, —
Much more than we shall ever pay.
Don't say, '*You'll try to do your share*,'
And try to look the martyr there;
Some son of Belial, or the Devil,
Has on the parish brought this evil,
To curse the church of Grumbleton,
And, Goodale, you're the Evil One!"
Thus saying, to show himself sincere,
He bellowed loud in Goodale's ear,
And, that he might more emphasize,
Shook his clinched fist before his eyes.

The adage says that "e'en a worm,
If trod upon," is apt to squirm.
And Deacon Goodale, though as mild
And meek in spirit as a child,
Not being perfect saint nor fool,
Was no exception to the rule.
But seeing Justice by his side,
And Wisdom ready for his guide,
He whispered them to save "*the cause*"
From broken heads and broken laws.
Still, in a world of strife and din,
'Tis hard to tell what might have been
But for the timely coming in

Of Deacon Small upon the scene.
For cuffs and combats, now and then,
Have happened to the best of men;
And when (as ancient history shows),
In argument 'twixt friends or foes,
One shakes his fist at the other's nose,
Debate is apt to end in blows.

By instinct canine for its keenness,
Though void of any doggish meanness,
Small smelt the bone of their contention;
And duty bound for intervention
Sprang in (than Small none could be braver),
To bark, as 'twere, in Titus' favor.
Instead whereof, without intending,
He stayed the battle then impending;
For as the rod, on steeple high,
Draws down the lightning from the sky,
The little man drew on himself
The anger of the man of pelf.

"You bantam!" (Titus thus began,
Fierce turning on the little man,
With awful strides and glaring eyes,
That seemed to shrivel him in size,
As fire shrivels up a shrimp,)
"What brought you here, you little imp!"
(Then aping Small), "*I've come to say*

I'm on both sides! I'm Brown! I'm Gray!
I would and wouldn't! I will and won't!
I wish! ah! no! I do and don't!
But if and — an; and if, I say, —
Perhaps, — I think, — we might — delay, —
Till we can get a little hay!"

Thus Titus emptied out his gall,
Sneering ineffably on Small,
"A pretty way to make a choice!"
(Resuming now his natural voice,)
"A pretty, whiffling, cunning fox!
Big champion of the orthodox!
A pretty snarl to get us in;
Then come to yap how smart you've been!
No, sir! your counsels are all evil;
They're like yourself, sir, of the Devil.
By just your kind of sage advice,
Adam was driven from paradise.
Yes, sir! a church split up with strife
Will haunt you, like a ghost, for life.
Had you not had an itch to speak,
But thrown yourself into the creek,
To oil the troubled waters *there*,
Or hung yourself up by the hair,
Or anything to keep you quiet,
Instead of having another riot
We might have had a horse to-day.

But you, sir, barked, sir, for delay!
Don't answer, sir! The case is clear.
I'll leave it to old Goodale here:
We might have got some horse or other;
Is that not so, my erring brother?"

Goodale, surprised, with kind intent
Replied the thing was evident.

Thus Small, whose thought had been to rise
High in the golden deacon's eyes, —
The little fellow's earthly heaven, —
By shrewd advice so timely given,
In lieu thereof now found himself
Appointed by the man of pelf,
To be sent forth, at setting sun,
The scape-goat of all Grumbleton.

Now wrathful Titus was appeased;
And Goodale not a little pleased,
Amazed, amused, and edified,
To see how Titus turned aside
The battle on his supple friend,
To bring their duel to an end.

Strange duel this; like scores of others
'Twixt foemen, friends, and Christian brothers,
They slur, throw mud, defy, defame,

And haggle one another's name,
(Like boys who hack with vandal knife
Some work of art worth more than life,)
Till their courageous breath is spent;
Then, struck by fear, they both repent,
Confess, make friends, shake hands, embrace,
With smiles that death cannot efface;
Or, glad to escape each other's blow,
They turn upon some common foe!

So two stout bulls, ere they engage
In deadly fight, to whet their rage,
First paw and throw the dirt around,
Bellowing till the plains resound,
Then in the conflict's awful shock
Crash their hard heads, and crooked horns lock,
With glaring eyes, with foaming breath,
Pushing and struggling to the death.
If now some whipper-snapper cur,
Attracted by the unwonted stir,
Come barking on the battle-field,
The bulls at once their conflict yield,
Their horns unlock as if by magic,
And comic scene succeeds the tragic;
With one consent, and tails high up,
Both bulls dash on the meddling pup!
And hence it verily seems to me
That pups had better quiet be.

But often they have more to say
Than grown-up dogs of deeper bay.

When Small had gone, the sullen day,
Like guilty culprit, slunk away;
And all the stars of heaven looked out,
To see what now the champions stout
Of Grumbleton would be about;
And all mankind, both far and near,
Stretched forth their eager, curious ear,
The news from Grumbleton to hear:
For Grumbleton was, for its size,
The largest place this side the skies.
Hence all the worlds, both low and high,
Stretched telescopic ear and eye,
To see what horse that church would buy.

Good Titus, finding Goodale game,
Went home to bed to hide his shame.
Goodale, surprised at his own pluck,
Laid half his victory to luck,
But said his prayers, resolved, that night,
Henceforth to stand up for the right,
However weak himself might be,
However strong his enemy.

For Truth is game, like fighting-cocks,
Ready to give and take hard knocks,

And if knocked down (see Bryant's pen),
Or "crushed to earth, will rise again,"
And crow defiant as before, —
Cheering to meet his foe once more.
But Error, like a dunghill fowl,
Delights in farm-yards fat to prowl,
And struts, with plumage bright and gay
To lead the silly hens astray;
But bring him fairly to the fray,
He soon turns tail, and runs away,
Or, standing, squawks if hurt a bit,
And dies if he be fairly hit.

Thus had the deacons' duel sped,
With clanging tongues, till each had said,
Thrice over, all he had to say,
In favor and against old Gray,
With other things mixed in and out,
Zigzag, criss-cross, and round about;
And in the end each mail-clad man
Stood where, at first, the fight began.
Though Titus, in his dreams that night,
Felt like a dunghill put to flight;
And Goodale woke, next morn, to scan
Himself the game-cock of a clan,
With half the parish cheering o'er
His victory of the day before,
And the other half half-stupefied

To think that Titus was defied;
While all were in profound amaze,
That Goodale had the pluck to raise
His spurs against Titus in a fight,
And put the golden cock to flight.
Such honors, thrust upon him then,
Have turned the heads of younger men;
But he was old, with higher aim,
That trembled at the gift of fame.

THE SITUATION.

A SWAMP-MIST, like a curtain, hung
O'er Grumbleton, and every tongue
Was clanging, like a fog-bell, loud,
To guide the wanderers in the cloud.
Crows, clamorous black-coats of the air,
In flocks were flitting here and there,
By instinct drawn whereby they know
Where food is waiting for a crow.
Their sable prophets had foretold
That Gray would fall when he was old;
And hence their watchmen looked to see
Fulfillment of the prophecy!
So when, from tower of neighboring tree,
They saw old Gray turned out to die,

They forthwith telegraphed the cry
From rook to rook, nor could withhold
The news, once loosed, till all were told.
No crow with less had been content;
For vacant stables they can scent
Half-way across the continent.
And now, in old Gray's fate, each saw
Food for a poor crow's hungry maw:
Hence with their caws the mist resounded,
And Grumbleton was worse confounded.
Additional, from far and near
Came men, and letters drawn by fear
"That the dear flock was shepherdless,"
With offers kind the fold to bless
With the best shepherd ever known,
Since sheep were yeaned or fleeces grown.
For parsons in old times, you see,
Could also scent a vacancy:
And candidates left in the lurch,
Were always looking for a church.
"These came in clouds" (old Goodale said),
"Like crows before old Gray was dead;"
And added, with a blushing face,
"These black-coats seem a hungry race."
Thus mist and clouds hung o'er the town
Of Grumbleton, now upside-down;
And none could tell what was to be,
As when a drifting ship at sea,

With half the crew in mutiny,
The captain bound, the chart unknown,
Sails rent, masts sprung, the compass gone,
Now tossed by storms, and now befogged,
Rolls near the breakers, water-logged,
Her anchor foul and handled rawly,
The times, at least, look rather squally.

Good Deacon Titus grew distraught,
With troubles more than he had thought;
For sometimes haply 'tis the fate
Of heaviest blows to reach the pate
That did the fight originate.
And Titus, shrewd, advancing man,
Gold-headed, leader of the clan,
Had long ago laid secret plan,
Unknown (of course) at first to all,
Save to his smallest shadow, Small,
Approved (why not?) by every one, —
To modernize old Grumbleton.
"*And now to have the upshot such!*"
Said Deacon Titus, "*'tis too much!*"
'Twas also said he swore a bit;
But this was only in a fit
Of anger, or by accident,
And not with any ill intent;
At least, not as a *bad man swears*,
But taken at odds or unawares:

A nice distinction made at times,
And hard to be explained in rhymes,
But known to courts ecclesiastic,
And reason in its flights fantastic,
And civil courts, throughout the nation,
By help of *mental aberration.*
So when a good man, bearing pelf,
Swears, lies, or steals, *he's not himself;*
But some foul sprite, outside or in,
And not himself, commits the sin.
Whereby the muse is glad to show,
What all the world is glad to know,
That when good Titus did aught evil,
'Twas not the deacon, but the Devil;
And when aught good he did to speak on,
'Twas not the Devil, but the deacon.

THE CHOICE.

Now many heads had Grumbleton,
In place of former golden one;
And every head seemed polygloted,
So much they pished, and pughed, and drotted.
For many heads have many views,
When parish-horse they have to choose;
And pampered tastes, in man or brute,

Will make the palate hard to suit.
The mist still hung upon the place,
And hooded every human face;
The crows still gathered round old Gray,
Cawing, impatient of delay,
And watching for their time to prey.
(Where they all came from no one knows,
But all the air seemed filled with crows.)
And horses still came fast and thick;
And all resolved to stay and stick,
Because the parish needed *one*.
Six months the equine course had run,
And yet the race seemed scarce begun.
The jockeys played keen trick and ruse,
Which made it harder yet to choose;
For who that has a horse to sell,
Is ever known the truth to tell?
The nags they liked, refused to stay:
One, when he smelt around old Gray,
Kicked up his heels and ran away.
Another at the oats and hay
Turned up his nose, and neighed for feed,
Broke loose and tore with frantic speed,
As if a spectre in the manger
Had seized him for a flying ranger.
The Bay, we know, though choice and true,
Would cost too much, and wouldn't do.
The Dapple, prancing on the sands,

Was voted off by show of hands.
The Bob, though famed for wind and speed,
Was terrible on hay and feed.
The Brown was perfect as could be,
But failed in point of pedigree.
Then came a long, lank, Sorrel screw,
With backbone, ribs, and rump in view, —
A Rozinant for Grumbleton,
Like him who bore the famous Don,
Ready to tilt right gallantly
'Gainst every windy heresy,
And snorting loud, like horse of war,
That smells the battle from afar.
The screw was sound, and cheap to buy,
But young folk raised such hue and cry
Against his awkward gear and gate,
It sent him drooping with his fate,
To call another candidate.
Next day of trial came, and brought
"*A horse which all the world had sought.*"
So said his owner to excite
The parish, with a jockey sleight,
Like fisher who to get "a bite,"
Throws bait that hides the hook from sight,
And tempts the fish's appetite.
"A horse," said he, "sound, willing, gay,
Kind, fast, and cheap, — a chestnut bay;
A horse that I have taught to know

Just how to *draw*, and when to *go!*"
In fact, he made as good a show
As any horse they yet had tried.
When lo! the inspectors' search espied
The *horse's hair and mane were* DYED!
The horse was *gray*, — an iron gray, —
But came, upon his trial day,
In color, a bright *chestnut bay!*
Dyed jockily, and thus disguised
Because the Gray was ostracized.
Of course this was the end of him,
And Grumbleton was still more grim.
Thus week by week, on invitation,
Nag after nag came on probation,
To fill the parish vacancy;
And none knew yet what was to be:
When lo! by strange fatuity —
Inexplicable mystery!
For such is fate, it came to pass,
The parish settled on an ass!
Mysterious phenomenon,
Unheard of save in Grumbleton.
Howe'er this fact was brought about,
Men differ, but the fact stands out;
From scores of nags to choose and pick,
From high and low, from thin and thick,
And after months of meditation,
On every kind of horse creation,

Yet, in the end, it came to pass,
The parish settled on an ass.
Mysterious phenomenon,
Unheard of save in Grumbleton:
Hard truth, indeed, for fate to weave,
In her dark web; hard to believe!
For ne'er before was such event
To any godly parish sent,
By choice, or fate, or accident:
Nor since has been in any land,
Nor shall be while the world shall stand.
Some laid the blame to mist and crows,
That flocked from where nobody knows;
And some to witches, elves, and sprites,
Hobgoblins, nightmares, and such frights;
Some to the stingy oats and hay;
And some, alas, on poor horse Gray;
And some on Titus, who, sore pressed,
Had said an ass would suit them best;
And some on Small, who, 'n times like these,
Did revel like a worm in cheese;
Then old friend Goodale's turn came next,
Because good Titus he had vexed;
And last they laid it, still perplexed,
Upon the parson's farewell text, —
"Behold your house (foretelling fate)
Is left unto you desolate."

OLD PARSON PRYNN.

But Parson Prynn had stood aloof
From clattering tongues and horse's hoof,
In retrospection living o'er
His happy life of years before,
Or looking to the life in store.
Upon the wings of hope sublime,
Above the clouds and storms of time,
He rose to the immortal clime.
He calmly rode upon the storm
That lashed his venerable form:
Amid confusion unconfused;
Philosophizing, half amused,
At earth's foundations out of course
Because the church would buy a horse, —
At theologic monkey-shines
Of laymen aping learned divines,
Puffy with pharisaic leaven,
And walking on their heads to heaven.
Still striving, with experienced hand,
To heal the troubles of the land;
Amazed at fate of old horse Gray;
Amazed at crows that flocked to prey;
Amazed to see his friends so scant,
And his good church so militant,
(For nearer to heaven they pressed each day,

Fighting each other by the way;)
Amazed to find his hopes and town
In his old days turned upside-down, —
He yet stood calmly, looking far,
Like pilot on the northern star,
Who, wrecked and tossed upon the sea,
Yet bravely waits his destiny,
And while he prays, Thy will be done,
Fears not the setting of the sun.
No fatalist was Parson Prynn,
But held that all things that had been,
And all that should hereafter be,
Were fixed from past eternity;
Yet also held that man was free, —
That souls, like ships launched on the wave,
Must find a haven or a grave.
Not with the hardness of the Turk,
  Who torpid waits his destiny,
But with the Christian's heart for work,
  Whate'er his Father's will might be,
He strove his gap of life to fill
With love to God, to men good-will, —
Still carrying sunshine to the poor,
And bread of life from door to door:
He kept not back the heavenly meat
From them who grudged him crumbs to eat;
The timorous soul, in arms of prayer,
He bore from dark pit of despair

To heaven's bright gate, and left him there,
Till Mercy rose and let him in,
A culprit pardoned of his sin;
To sick men's agonies and fears,
To widows' loneliness and tears,
To orphans in their helpless years,
And to the homeless wanderer,
He did, with Christ-love, minister;
Beauty for ashes of the dead
He gave to hearts whose hopes had fled;
And with the dying, side by side,
He walked down to the silent tide,
As far as living man can go,
To that sad bourn of human woe,
As near as mortal feet may tread
The noiseless river of the dead,
And there did watch the flickering flame,
Until the dark-winged angel came,
To bear away the precious prize, —
A ransomed soul to paradise.
With heart and works like these, good Prynn
Scarce heard the parish noise and din;
Scarce felt the tempest's angry wave,
That might yet bear him to the grave;
Nor saw the sly approach of Want,
That, secret, came grim-eyed and gaunt;
The walking ghost of parish rage,
To haunt him from the parsonage;

Half heedless of the ragged coat,
And dingy kerchief round his throat,
And breeches old, with patch and tear,
Which parish thrift gave him to wear,
To prove him old and antiquated,
And Lazarus-like dilapidated,
Unfit to bring for any one
The news from heaven to Grumbleton,
Unfit to preach to well dressed sinners,
Or eat the remnants of their dinners.
Ripened by clouds as well as sun,
By sufferings like the Holy One,
He trod his way, and nearer God
Approached by every step he trod,
And with him would have taken his people,
Could they have looked above the steeple.
As streams do from their fountains flow,
And fruit from its own trees doth grow,
And from sweet buds sweet flowers blow,
And golden sheaves from golden seeds,
E'en so from good men's hearts good deeds.
Like grows from like. Weeds spring from weeds.
The devil in man breeds devilishness,
Vile scorpions that crawl forth to oppress,
With stings of death, the human race.
But Christ in man sends forth sweet grace,
To walk earth's grave-cleft, mouldering sod,

Like Enoch when he walked with God,
In paths the Blessed Feet once trod;
To lift men from the miry clay
Up to the light of endless day.
In Prynn's good heart Christ had his dwelling,
A fount whose streams were ever swelling,
A sun whose beams were ever glowing,
A tree whose fruits were ever growing,
A flower whose sweets, to heaven ascending,
Were with celestial odors blending.
Indwelling Christ, the Christ in man,
As God in Christ; mysterious plan!
Nought else survives the grave's dark portal,
Nothing but goodness is immortal.

It matters little what we gain,
  It matters little what we lose;
For pleasures always die in pain,
  And Death is sure to claim his dues.

The rich man's palace, like the cot,
  Is shadowed by the passing cloud;
Both meet, at last, the common lot, —
  The grave, the coffin, and the shroud.

The rich and poor, life's struggles o'er,
  Are found at last of equal worth,
Whate'er their wealth or want before,
  A bed and covering of earth.

Man's only good on earth is heaven;
His greatest joy blooms on the rod
By which his wandering soul is driven
Back to his happy home with God.

When earth, with all its pomp and pride,
Shall fade at last to great and small,
Then heaven's bright gates will open wide,
With equāl welcome unto all.

With such good thoughts did Father Prynn
Solace himself for parish sin,
Of starving him and his good Gray
(A gentle hint, as if to say,
"Now die, old horse, or go away"), —
A mode peculiar to that day.
But not without solicitude
Did he look on his old Gray, good,
Now weak and lean from lack of food.
And even Titus said 'twas "guilt
That no asylum had been built
For parson or the parish jade,
When eleemosynary made;
For other paupers pains were taken,
But these, more sacred, were forsaken."
It made that golden deacon's eye
Flow watery streams of piety,
And flushed his honest soul with rage,

"That parish servants, in old age,
Had not an almshouse where to fly,
Instead of staying there to die,
Where sinners made it an excuse
To slur the church with their abuse,
And rail the righteous for their riches,
Like sons of Belial and the witches."

Old Goodale held that poor Gray's case
"Was tougher, and less lined with grace,
Than e'en his master's; for good Prynn,
When starved to death, would leave all pain,
And rags, and go at once to rest,
Like Lazarus to Abram's breast.
But every truant school-boy knows,
The horse that starves on highway goes,
By transmigration, into crows."

OLD GRAY AND THE RAVENS.

Thus simple and half desperate,
To save old Gray from such black fate,
By superstition urged, and love,
And conscious power of right to move,
Old Goodale schemed, and laid his course,
To cheat the crows, and save the horse.

In sooth, of Goodale one might say,
He *loved a horse;* and with old Gray
His life was in full sympathy.
The horse was old, and so was *he;*
Was poor, and *he* knew poverty;
The horse was *legs* for Parson Prynn,
And *he* his *right hand* long had been,
And for the parish, ere the strife,
Had been a pack-horse half his life,
And knew as well as old Gray could
The power of parish gratitude.
Moved thus in pity for the jade,
A pious pilgrimage he made,
Ere yet the frost had killed the grass,
And ere the church had stalled the ass.
From house to house, day after day,
A-begging for the poor horse Gray,
A peck of oats, a tuft of hay,
A sheaf of straw, a little meal,
With eager eloquence of zeal,
And action suited to appeal.
Nor did he always ask in vain:
Some gave and bade him come again,
So that old Gray's hay, straw, and grain,
In answer to old Goodale's toil,
Were like the widow's cruse of oil;
And even Titus, at the sight,
Gave what he called "his widow's mite;"

And thus, like parson sent adrift,
Old Gray found refuge and a shift.

In Goodale's yard a woodshed old
Was thatched, to shield him from the cold;
And there safe-housed at home was he,
Groomed, fed, and rubbed by charity.
And yet the horse, with horse-like torpor,
Ne'er dreamed himself a parish pauper,
Though whinnying, with expressions meek,
The gratitude he could not speak.
He always knew the welcome tread
Of Goodale with his daily bread,
And raised his voice as if to bless
The hand that pitied his distress;
And Goodale answered voice for voice,
With words that made old Gray rejoice, —
"A parson's horse has far more sense
Than many men of providence."
Nor was he fed and stroked in vain,
But throve, and felt his oats again,
And seemed his colt-hood to renew,
So well in looks and strength he grew;
Then restless grew not to be known
As sacred pauper of the town,
And, pawing, longed to take the 'road,
With willing back beneath the load,
Which by long use had come to be

His nature and necessity;
For horse and man must have employment
To gain the hill-top of enjoyment.
And Gray no idler was, but one
To spend his strength till strength was gone,
And die, at last, with harness on,
Like his old master, Parson Prynn;
For horse and man so long had been,
And oft, on parish rounds together,
They were but parts of one another:
So when at length again old Gray
Was harnessed to the parish dray,
And Goodale gave good Prynn the reins,
For farewell round through parish lanes,
They both looked like themselves once more,
And younger than ten years before;
At least, in Goodale's weakening eyes,
Who stood, and thus soliloquized:
"O brave, good horse! were man as true,
And faithful to his work as you,
The world were better for us all,
And man a better animal!
O parson good! if men but knew
What life of theirs is hid in you,
They'd drive you not from holy seat,
Nor grudge you earthly bread and meat,
Nor let the cold, rough, wintry airs
Blow rudely thus your thin, white hairs,

Bleached white for them by toil and cares.
They've plucked the spring-time of your youth,
And manhood's summer; now, forsooth,
They spurn your autumn, like dumb brutes,
That trample on the ripest fruits
While reaching green, young, sapling boughs,
The half-formed fruit, and twigs to browse.
'*Now go!*' they say, when well they know
They've robbed you of the strength to go!
They've drained your life out, and now say,
'*Go forth, old parson! Go, old Gray!*
Through storms, through wintry cold and snows,
Go! homeless, hungry, food for crows.'
God pity the old parson now!
With that white crown around his brow,
A prince, and yet a beggar he,
To live and die on charity!
God pity him and poor old Gray,
And *us* at the *great judgment-day!*"
Thus Goodale for the thousandth time,
Relieved himself of parish grime.

PARSON YOUNG.

Good Prynn still kept the sunny side,
Opening his door and windows wide,

To let the light of heaven come in, —
The sick heart's sweetest medicine.
Wrapped in the sun, with cheery view,
He saw his vine bud forth anew,
To bless and beautify the land,
By tillage of a younger hand;
And streams renewed of heavenly grace,
Through channel of a fresher face.
'Tis true he felt the winter's cold,
But then he knew that he was *old;*
For good friend Titus long ago
Had kindly come and told him so,
And he in simple faith, forsooth,
Had taken the deacon's word for truth,
Without the proofs which, in few days,
Unasked, came by a score of ways, —
From warm debate in parish meeting,
Condoling words in friendly greeting,
Sharp gazing at his thin, white hairs,
That had been gray a score of years,
And at his coat, which he had worn
Ten years since first 'twas patched and torn.
So he good Titus did believe,
And owned *'twas time for him to leave.*

We know the parish providence,
Their pious zeal and diligence,
And works, and patience, and delay,

To get successor to the Gray:
The same good angels helped bring in
Successor to good Parson Prynn;
And all the ladies used their eyes
Becomingly to criticise;
And parish daughters, old, and young,
And middling, aided with the tongue.

We know the little deacon's plan, —
A thousand dollars' worth of man
For half the sum. For Small was willing
To give his sixpence for a shilling,
To please fastidious tastes, and, worse,
To please the stingy parish purse,
A thing well known among the pious,
But scorned by men of worldly bias.
And, in his little garret, Small
Had hid a model clergical,
Of what a parson ought to be, —
Which he had cribbed burglariously:
Perfect in polished cleric points,
From head to foot, wind, limb, and joints,
With soul seraphic understood,
That needed little earthly food,
And loved the flock, but not the fleece.
Small showed it when he spoke his piece,
To make distinct to every one
The parson fit for Grumbleton;

So that the parish knew, by heart,
Just what they needed from the start.
They needed much a perfect, free,
And easy talker, pastorly,
To visit six days in the week,
The straying sheep and lambs to seek:
But needed most a pulpit wonder, —
A Boanerges, son of thunder,
Apollo with his eloquence,
St. Paul for argument and sense,
St. John with loving heart and mind,
And these so mixed and recombined,
Artistic, as to make up one
Good preacher for good Grumbleton;
Nice dressed, to suit the modern style,
And trimmed with small talk to beguile
The hours that lag in drawing-rooms,
And rid religion of its glooms.
And last, not least, important thing, —
Youthful, a David with his sling
And stones to slay the Philistine;
With face, voice, song, and psalm divine,
To please the youth; "for, after all,
They are the people," said good Small.
"A parson young, with heavenly eyes,
Will surely lift them to the skies;
A graceful parson sure will show
That grace with piety may grow;

And parishes are always blest
When parsons are divinely dressed,
Unless, perchance, the well-bred youth
Be too polite to speak the truth."

No one could answer argument
Of Small, so smooth and provident.
And many cleric candidates
Did try their best against the fates,
Like horses racing for the stakes,
Spurred sharply for their stomachs' sakes;
But, panting, left the prize unwon,
So hard to win was Grumbleton!
Till, tired, the parish made, at last,
Good Titus head as in the past;
And he, to give the parish rest,
From all on trial chose the best.

Vain rest! when parish storms, in store,
May rise again, as heretofore;
And Parson Young may soon grow old,
And never know it till he's told;
And sisters love, with pious features,
To go to church to hear young preachers,
With praises for the sacred pet,
And hearts upon the altar set.
But Titus dreams his war is done,
And, surely, peace must have begun.

But he is not the only one
With daughters fair in Grumbleton,
Whose hearts, and hands, and heritage,
Would grace a youthful parsonage.
And what is one among so many?
Whereof few think, perchance, if any;
For each sweet charmer doth expect
To be the chosen and elect,
And in her sleeve laughs at the folly
Of disappointed Grace and Polly.
But disappointed dames or lasses
Breed little peace for parish asses.

BACKED OUT.

But why anticipate the night
While day is flooding us with light?
Good Titus saw the sky was blue,
And even clouds had golden hue;
And having in his heart, concealing,
More than he needed of good feeling,
He ran, with haste, to Father Prynn,
To share with him the joys therein;
By which to help him bear his fate,
And parsonage hurry to vacate,
Or back him out affectionate;

For Prynn was weak, and ties were strong
That bound him to the place so long;
And Titus, joyful to the brim,
With surplusage would comfort him.
"Good-by, old horse!" (he thus began,
O'erjoyous, half-forgetful man) —
"Good-day! I mean. A slip of tongue,
From thinking of our pastor, Young!
You know, of course, he wants the place,
Is waiting; but 'twould be disgrace
To put new bird in an old cage,
Like this worm-eaten parsonage:
He might break out, you know, some day,
And, ere we knew it, fly away!
The house has leaked ten years at least,
And isn't fit for man or beast;
So if you *could* go out next week,
Or say to-day, 'twould, so to speak,
Aid us in doing what we're able,
To clean, as 'twere, the Augean stable.
I see, by twitchings in your face,
'Tis hard to leave the dear old place!
But then 'tis wrong for us, you know,
To set our hearts on things below.
Besides, we have a better home,
Where angels beckon us to come;
A heavenly mansion where, dear friend,
Our partings will forever end:

Nor *endless cash* is needed there,
To keep the *building* in *repair*.
It must be joy to you, good Prynn!
To leave the world of toil and sin;
Like man afield, who eyes the sun,
To see how near his work is done.
Hard have you toiled here many years,
For which we've blessed you with our tears,
And fondly always looked above
For your reward of toil and love.
And glad we are that none has found
Your doctrine, life, or heart unsound;
We have all searched, and searched in vain,
For aught in you to give us pain:
Except it grieved us all to see
You saved none of your salary,
But used it faster than we paid it, —
I say it now and oft have said it, —
And so have left us in arrears,
One half each year, for full ten years;
A thousand dollars due to you,
Which you will have to lose or sue, —
A parson-like improvidence,
Just like their lack of common sense!
For even the bees, that gather honey,
Might teach you how to lay up money;
But that you never did, nor would,
And now I tell you for your good.

'*Why didn't we pay you as we should?*'
Because, you know, good Father Prynn,
That when the city tide flowed in,
We had as much as we could do;
We had to build our houses 'skew,
And dress to suit the fashions new,
And lay out grounds, or what's their name,
So that the more the money came,
Our wants kept coming in the same,
To cover up as 'twere our shame,
And make us decent, in the eyes
Of people whom we learned to prize,
But who, you know, could criticise.
And then your salary to raise,
You know, we tried all sorts of ways, —
First prayers, thanksgivings, fasting-days;
Then raffles, fairs, and lotteries;
Until you said, 'you'd starve and freeze,
Rather than live by *parish gambling*.'
This showed us that your *mind was rambling*,
Weakened by age; and then, perforce,
We had to buy another horse,
And leave you suffering, in old age,
In this old woodchuck parsonage,
The chimney down, the siding off,
And daylight shining through the roof.
I hope *you'll leave it soon*, good Prynn,
To let the carpenters come in,

And make it fit for Parson Young."
Thus Titus rattled with his tongue,
Like crazy-brained, o'erflowing boy,
Delighted with a new-bought toy.
Nor word had answered Father Prynn,
Though laughing all the while within;
But said, as Titus left the door,
"Your speech is cheerful, deacon, very;
Let us thank God, who made us poor,
That He has also made us merry."

Titus was gone; but on the wall
His shadow stood, — good Deacon Small,
Who came to tell, with parting word,
What things were false that Prynn had heard,
About his (Small's) great influence,
In plotting Prynn's departure hence.
"You know," said Small, "how matters stand;
Friend Titus owns the purse and land,
And loves to have the upper hand;
And hence, about changing parish horse,
We had to let him have his course,
Or true religion would have flown
From Grumbleton to parts unknown;
Which thing, I knew, would break your heart,
Wherefore, in fact, I took your part.
My heart and vote have been with you,
To whom my all below is due.

You helped me in my swaddling-time,
To worm out from the pit and slime;
You taught me, by your text on small things,
Not to despise myself of all things,
And that, too, in my days of youth,
Ere I had reached my present growth;
And eloquence, when small and weak,
I learned from hearing *you*, sir, *speak;*
And by your words I hope to crawl
To seats in highest heaven!" said Small.
Thus did the Lilliputian man,
Disguised as good Samaritan,
His buttery words for balsam pour
Into the wounded parson's sore:
And closed the act with "One word more:
I trust you see my gratitude, —
That I've done all things for your good;
And that you believe too much in virtue
To think that *I* would try to *hurt you.*"
To whom Prynn, with a twinkling smile,
To ease the little man of guile,
Said what the ox said to the fly
Upon his horn, with humor sly, —
"Why, bless you! little Deacon Small!
I didn't feel you, sir, at all!"
Then exit, smiling, tricksy elf,
And grandly conscious of himself.

Scarce had he gone when old horse Gray,
Now shining with his oats and hay,
Was whinnying at the parson's door,
And Goodale entered as of yore;
Not stooping as he did before
He Titus gave the drubbing sore;
Nor dodging now the haughty curse,
With fears to offend the rich man's purse;
Nor terror in his gentle tones;
Nor cringing of his marrow bones;
But straight and firm, as on the day
He rescued from the tombs old Gray;
With backbone exercise erect,
And manly, conscious self-respect.
The two old friends of twenty years,
With prayers commingling meet, and tears,
Twin-hearted, linked by sufferings,
And joys, and hopes of holy things,
And faith, and love of all things good,
And ties of endless brotherhood.
Goodale, with gentle hand, untwines
The tendrils of the parson's vines,
That cling so lovingly and strong
To the old home they've cheered so long;
Her rose-bush too, nursed with such care,
For May's dear sake, still standing where
She left it, with the dew-drops wet,
And bearing sweet white roses yet.

But every window, room, and door,
And every plank in the old floor,
And every tree, plant, bush, and flower,
Clung to the parson with strange power,
While he was struggling this sad day,
Struggling to tear himself away.
It seemed a kind of death, at last,
Severing him from all the past;
And when, with final pang and groan
Known to his silent heart alone,
The ties were cut, and Prynn was gone,
It seemed the parsonage soul had fled;
Cold, empty, dark, the house was dead.

THE HOME LOVE.

A thousand memories bound him there, —
  The blossoms and the fruits of years;
Loves, labors, watchings, hopes, and prayer,
  And joys, but, most of all, his tears.

From this old nest his birdlings fledged,
  Flew forth, with blessings on their wing;
And to the sacred roof-tree, pledged,
  Yearly returned with joy to sing.

Sorrow had sanctified the place;
For May, his other life, from this
Sweet home, she blessed with so much grace,
Ascended to the higher bliss.

And Parson Prynn and his sweet May
Were one, if ever twain were one;
She left him when his hair was gray,
But ere his Master's work was done.

Flesh of his flesh, his life's sweet life,
Who long had loved and cherished her,
The old man's heart died with his wife;
His home became her sepulchre.

Though buried in the churchyard near,
He spoke not of her as the *dead*,
But talked with her as *living here*,
In an immortal union wed.

He needed not the limner's art
To keep the memory of her face;
Her living image in his heart,
Unchanged by death, still held its place.

No picture on the homestead wall,
No saint in consecrated shrine,

Nor art inspired, could so recall
The features of a soul divine.

Next to his Lord did he adore
His sainted May, as years grew dim;
And most of all he loved her for
The likeness which she bore to Him.

He hears her voice, — sweet, soft, and fair;
He hears her footsteps go and come;
She kneels with him in daily prayer,
At the dear altar of their home.

'Twas this that made that home so dear,
Though old, decayed, and little worth;
To him, with all his memories here,
There was no other home on earth.

But oftener now he looks afar,
To see, within his Father's gates,
The house where many mansions are,
And longs to go, but meekly waits.

Then leave him till his time shall come:
Why open all his griefs afresh?
By driving him from that dear home,
You wound him deeper than the flesh.

Perchance, you wound the Christ on high,
Who lives in endless sympathy
With wounded man, and from the sky
Cries out, "Ye do it unto me!"

REFUGE.

In Goodale's cot, that night, the sleep
Of Prynn was dreamless, sound, and deep.
Angels of God still camp around
The tent where such good men are found.
And poor men's pity for the poor
Brings double blessings down in store,
To them who give and them who take,
The gift of love, for Jesus' sake.
Nor angels left that humble home,
Nor frugal plenty ceased to come,
While Goodale lived, with staff and stay.
And, after he had passed away,
His children's children blessed the day
When he had rescued old horse Gray
And his good master from the cold,
When they were homeless, poor, and old:
The places where they slept and ate,
Seemed blessed thenceforth and consecrate;
While on the sacred parish Fate
Had sternly written, Desolate.

Meanwhile the crows had disappeared,
The mist from Grumbleton had cleared,
The silent snow lay on the ground,
And scarce was heard a living sound
When Parson Prynn and old horse Gray
Where seen by Goodale on their way
To parts unknown to them and him;
But human eyes are often dim.

All Grumbleton was still asleep,
In snoring slumbers, fast and deep.
The roosters crowed with stifled voice,
As if with light they'd scarce rejoice;
The kine their drowsy courses took,
In silence to the water brook,
Across the shrouded paths of snow,
With measured footsteps, soft and slow,
As if afraid their muffled tread
Might wake the village of the dead.
The sky was heavy overhead,
And heavy on the parson's breast;
But clouds were breaking in the west,
And westward lay the good man's course,
Whence light shone on both man and horse,
When they had reached the hill-top high,
Stamping their profile on the sky.
Bright token! which old Goodale cheered,
Who watched them till they disappeared.

That light shone not on Grumbleton.
God wot if e'er it shine again !
But they who sleep ask not the sun ;
And dead men have no sense of pain.

SEQUEL.

Old Gray lived many years, it seems ;
For ofttimes he appeared in dreams
To Titus on his bed at night,
Who always trembled at the sight.
"No nightmare this!" Titus would say,
"But veritable old horse Gray,
Who thus survives to trample on
The peaceful rest of Grumbleton!"
But dreams, like fables, are fictitious,
And golden heads oft superstitious.

But this we know, with all the rest,
That Parson Prynn was Goodale's guest,
Year out, year in, for many a year,
And younger grew with Christmas cheer.
From distant parish, hale and sound,
He came as sure as year came round.
For Prynn lived long the world to bless,
Nor died the death of idleness.

And these two friends would sit and chat,
Day in, day out, of this and that,
With hearts as airy as a feather,
And laugh and praise the Lord together;
And living o'er again their joys,
Pass backward and become two boys:
Then part, with joyous song of praise
To Wisdom for her length of days, —
With chorus quaint for gray-beard tongue,
"*The merry heart is always young.*"

And Gray, — why, bless him! old horse Gray
Was parson's legs for many a day.
In Prynn's new parish was no dearth
Of wisdom to discern his worth;
And, popular, no critic dunce
Could fail to see his points at once.
Gray knew the rounds his master took,
And had grave, ministerial look,
By long experience, which doth tend
To make e'en horses reverend.
The people loved the good old horse,
But loved his master most, of course;
And by an annual feast gave thanks
That Grumbleton had played such pranks,
And, swine-like, trampled on the gem
Which else had never come to them.
Old Gray his pastoral habits showed

At every gate-post on the road;
And if he missed a single door,
'Twas never cottage of the poor.
Thus Gray lived many years, to bless
Both souls and bodies in distress;
And then — his work-days being over —
Lived as *he should, and died* in clover.

THE LIVING FIELDS.

WHILE good men sleep, the living seeds
They've sown, into rich harvests shoot;
They rest from labor, but their deeds
Do follow, with immortal fruit.

Prayers, like the angels, never die;
But to and fro, to heaven's sweet bowers,
And back, on tireless wings, they fly,
With blessings for this world of ours.

And, in the Holy Book, 'tis said
That sacred viáls are kept, in heaven,
With tears of saints, in sorrow shed,
As pledge of souls to be forgiven.

These poured from windows of the skies,
In odorous showers, spread o'er the place

Whence they exhaled, from weeping eyes,
And fill the fields with fruits of grace.

Thence wafted, like the breath of flowers,
Again they rise to realms above;
Again to fall, in joyous showers,
In a perpetual round of love.

Thus has it been, through many years,
Where long ago, his work all done,
Good Father Prynn, 'mid joys and tears,
Sank down, like setting of the sun.

That sacred decade of his toil,
The last and best that he had given,
With willing hands to willing soil,
Made his new parish sweet, like heaven.

He sowed; the blossoms grew to fruits; —
The fruits, well sheltered from the blast,
And nourished from the living roots,
Grew ripe, and safe were housed at last.

Then came the sowing-time once more,
With promise of the harvest blest;
When lo! a voice, — "Thy work is o'er;
Servant, well done! Come, now, and rest!"

Fair spring had decked the brow of May
With pure, white blossoms; and the birds
Were singing, all the live-long day,
Their anthems of unwritten words.

White blossoms wreathed the old man's head,
As fragrant and as pure as they.
They asked him why he smiled; he said,
"I hear the song of my sweet May!"

'Tis only with immortal birth
The good man struggles when he dies:
"*He's dead!*" groans out the stricken earth;
"*He lives!*" is answered from the skies.

Thus passed his soul on spring's sweet breath,
And in celestial arms of love
Was carried from the room of death,
To sing with his sweet May above.

He sings, while from the living field,
That gave the aged exile rest,
Full sheaves are borne, which harvests yield,
To crown the memory of the blest.

FINIS.

And what, the while, of Grumbleton?
A carcass, if the salt be gone,
Or if the salt has lost its savor,
Retaineth not good smell nor flavor,
But rots. And quick the banished light
Is followed by incoming night.
At least 'twas so in times a-gone,
And likely so in Grumbleton.
For records, ploughed up with the sod,
Where 'tis surmised that place once stood,
Signed by their church clerk, Ichabod,
Show that the parish groped about,
As if the sun had been put out,
When gas was yet too dear to buy,
And oil and lamps were scarce and high;
That darkness like a plague prevailed,
Blind-staggers man and horse assailed;
The crops grew sickly-pale and failed;
The rot seized hold upon the sheep,
And they who watched them fell asleep,
Drugged, seemingly, to slumbers deep;
Then dearth crept in with winter cold,
Shriveled and pinched the drowsy fold,
And made e'en shrunken Titus scold,
At lack of bread mid heaps of gold.

Men eked along, on stores laid in
In plenteous times of Parson Prynn,
Eating while their provisions lasted,
And then, when out of food, they fasted;
But fasting led to greater bother;
For men, grown lean, scarce knew each other,
And brother fell afoul of brother,
Battling till all were bruised and mangled.
So much were their affairs entangled,
That living long on milk and water,
And braying each other in the mortar,
And lacking wholesome light and food,
E'en preaching did them little good.
In vain they fasted, brayed, alas!
In vain. And vainly brayed the ass.
Goodale's descendants, and such men,
Went forth, and ne'er came back again,
Warned by a dream of coming woe.
Thus much the parish records show,
And there they end. Hence they who know,
Say, "*Grumbleton has gone below.*"
Besides, no map gives any trace,
In Christendom, of such a place;
And Father Prynn has searched, in vain,
On every heavenly hill and plain,
With Goodale's help, for any one,
These fifty years, from Grumbleton.

Hence they affirm who ought to know
(For where else could the parish go?)
That Grumbleton has gone below.
That's all. Amen. It may be so.

Old Horse Gray

AND

THE PARISH OF GRUMBLETON.

BY

EDWARD HOPPER.

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